



Supporting the vulnerable this winter

Briefing note
September 2022



**Libraries
Connected**

Introduction

Public libraries have always offered a warm safe space to those who need it, but the energy and cost-of-living crises means demand is likely to be much higher this winter.

While the Energy Price Guarantee is hugely welcome, average energy bills are still likely to be twice what they were last winter. And we continue to face the highest inflation in 40 years, with food being one of the largest contributors.

Our survey of over 50 library leaders, carried out this month, found that nearly 60% are actively considering taking part in a “warm bank” scheme, with many hoping to provide additional support such as hot drinks, warm clothes and advice on managing bills.

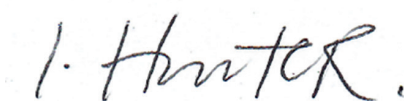
Only 4% of library leaders expect to receive any extra funding for this activity, however. That makes it uncertain if, or for how long, they will be able to provide it.

There is a clear need for dedicated funding for library services to provide immediate and targeted help to those most in need, likely in partnership with local charities, faith groups and community organisations.

The government has rightly emphasised the role of personal responsibility in conserving energy and avoiding supply shortages. Libraries have an important role here too, acting as a trusted source of information, practical support and guidance as we all try to save money and fuel this winter. This will build on the work of the Green Libraries Partnership, of which we are a partner alongside CILIP, Arts Council England, the British Library and Julie’s Bicycle.

We know that libraries are determined to support people through the difficult months ahead, but without additional resources the number they can help will be severely restricted. And it will be difficult, if not impossible, for them to plan a programme of support for the whole winter.

A relatively small investment across the library network could have a huge impact, allowing libraries to use their local knowledge and connections to provide targeted support at this critical time.



Isobel Hunter MBE
Chief Executive
Libraries Connected



Why libraries?

Librarians are among Britain's most trusted professions, working hard to create welcoming and accessible spaces. For this reason, people in need often feel more comfortable approaching a library than a council building or charity office. Users know they can stay all day if they need to, with no one asking intrusive or difficult questions.

Seeking help from a library is stigma-free. There is no need to make an appointment and all library users are offered the same range of services, whatever their reason for being there.

There are almost 3,000 public libraries in England. Located in our town centres, high streets and villages, they are frequented by people of all ages and backgrounds. Public libraries form a ready made network of community venues in every part of the country, with unrivalled local knowledge and well established partnerships. They are also able to leverage other sources of funding through their local authority, such as the holiday activities and food programme and the Housing Support Fund, amplifying their impact and reach.



The public library network gives councils and government a key facility in almost every community. Targeted investment in them would undoubtedly help communities as they deal with the challenges posed by rising prices.

**Cllr Gerald Vernon-Jackson
Chair of LGA Culture, Tourism and Sport Board**

Case studies

Northumberland

The library service in Northumberland is working with Northumberland Communities Together - a partnership between the county council and community groups, established to lead the response to Covid - to create a network of Warm Spaces and Places. Northumberland libraries will offer a hot drink and biscuit in addition to their usual range of services including books, newspapers and magazines for all ages, free wifi, PCs and phone charging. Libraries will also organise activities to suit demand, such as dominoes, communal jigsaws and lego, and users will be encouraged to bring their own crafts and hobbies with them.

North Tyneside

North Tyneside libraries plan to offer a “warm welcome” this autumn and winter, promoting their libraries as a place to come in the colder weather. They will have hot drinks available and are looking at a range of simple free activities, such as crosswords and board games, as well as referring customers to their regular events. The service is planning to renew some of its comfortable furniture and is also exploring having facilities for young families, such as high chairs and bottle warmers. Some North Tyneside libraries already share their buildings with the council’s customer service team and have advice sessions from organisations like Citizens Advice. The service is also buying new stock on topics like budgeting.

Leeds

This winter, Leeds library service will be working with its customer service partners in their combined Community Hubs and Libraries to promote a campaign around the slogan “A warm welcome awaits”. The offer will focus on free refreshments and activities to do in the library, especially for children and families. The Community Hubs and Libraries in Leeds offer a wrap-around service where support with housing, council tax and benefits is offered alongside standard library services.

GLL

GLL is a charitable social enterprise that operates libraries in Dudley, Lincolnshire and the London boroughs of Bromley, Greenwich and Wandsworth. It is now making sure that all its libraries can become “warm havens” for people who may find it difficult to heat their homes. GLL is reviewing each of its library buildings and, if necessary, introducing new furniture to make them more comfortable for users who may be spending long periods of time there. Library staff are also increasing the number of coffee mornings and afternoon tea sessions on offer. A number of GLL libraries offer free lunches for children during school holidays, working in partnership with the local authority and charities, and anticipate demand for these to increase. Some GLL branches also act as collection centres for foodbanks, partnering with them to make sure that people collecting food can also have books.

Barbican

There will be a “warm winter welcome” campaign to promote a network of Warm Spaces. These will be places where people from across the City can come together to stay warm and enjoy a cup of tea, a biscuit and a chat. They will include libraries, community centres, churches and other private and public sector spaces. Some of these spaces will also provide advice and information on reducing energy consumption. The library service will be increasing its capacity, offering activities and information and emphasising its role in helping people to fill out forms (digital or paper) for benefit claims. Libraries will be working closely with the City Advice service to ensure people have access to the right information and advice.

What support could libraries provide this winter?

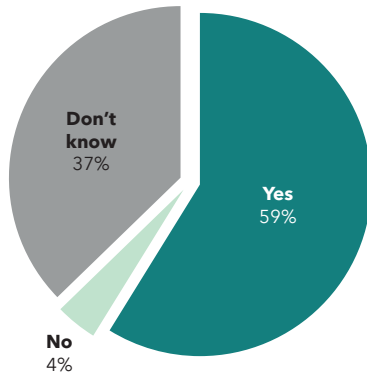
Every public library will offer a warm space and a warm welcome this winter. But many are aiming to provide an additional layer of support targeted at those struggling with food, clothing and energy bills. Activities and projects that could be supported by dedicated funding include:

- Extending opening hours during the colder months
- Offering complimentary hot drinks and snacks
- Running energy saving advice sessions in partnership with a local charity
- Installing additional and more comfortable seating to cope with increased demand and longer stays
- Working with an older people's charity to distribute warm items such as blankets, hot water bottles and wheat bags
- Purchasing high chairs, bottle warmers and sterilisers for young families
- Purchasing new games, puzzles and crafts to keep users amused for long periods
- Running after school homework clubs and Christmas holiday activities
- Training library workers as "energy champions" so they are able to provide one-to-one energy help and advice
- Partnering with a local charity to distribute home energy packs (eg radiator reflectors, draught excluders, double glazing film)
- Working with a community transport service to bring older people to the library for "knit and natter" sessions

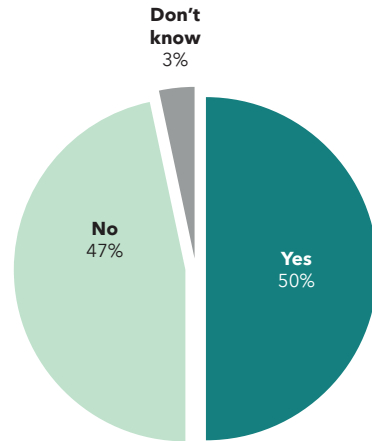


Survey data

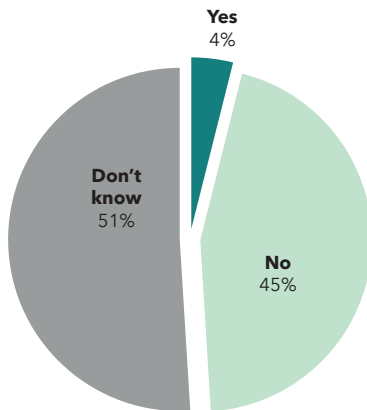
Is your library service actively considering taking part in a formal warm bank scheme this winter?



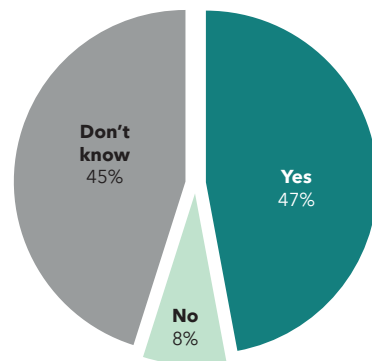
Has your participation in a formal warm bank scheme been confirmed?



Have you received, or do you expect to receive, additional funding to provide additional support this winter?



Will you be working in partnership with another organisation to provide services to those experiencing fuel poverty this winter?



What additional support are you planning to offer those experiencing fuel poverty this winter?

Signposting to charities and other council departments	45	88%
Advice and information	39	76%
Additional activities to keep people amused for long periods	31	61%
Hot drinks	22	43%
Extra desks/seating	20	39%
Distribution of warm items	11	22%
Warm clothes	6	12%

Total responses: 51. August/September 2022. For full data tables please contact us.



About Libraries Connected

Libraries Connected is a membership organisation representing heads of library services in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. We take a leading role in the development of public libraries through advocating for the power of libraries, sharing best practice and helping to shape the public library service now and in the future.

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